

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19141

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SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: LOWMAN'S MEETING WITH MAJOR
GENERAL FUANGCHALOEI ANIRUTTHEWA

REF: BANGKOK 17357

1. SUMMARY: LOWMAN JULY 5 MET WITH MAJOR GENERAL FUANG-
CHALOEI ANIRUTTHEWA, CHAIRMAN OF THE THAI INTERAGENCY COM-
MITTEE ON INDOCHINESE REFUGEES, TO DISCUSS LOCAL SETTLE-
MENT. FUANGCHALOEI REITERATED THE THEME OF HIS JUNE 15
MEETING WITH LOWMAN--THAT THAILAND CANNOT ACCEPT LOCAL
SETTLEMENT UNTIL THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN THE COUNTRY
HAS DECLINED. SINCE JUNE 15 (REFTEL), FUANGCHALOEI HAS
BECOME MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF USING US
SEED MONEY TO INITIATE PILOT PROJECTS FOR SMALL NUMBERS
OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. END SUMMARY.

2. FUANGCHALOEI OPENED BY THANKING LOWMAN FOR THE TIME
THAT HE IS SPENDING ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, AND
PARTICULARLY FOR HIS RETURN VISIT TO THAILAND. FUANG-
CHALOEI SAID THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM REMAINS: THE
INFLOW OF REFUGEES INTO THAILAND IS NOT BEING BALANCED
BY SUFFICIENT NUMBERS ACCEPTED FOR RESETTLEMENT BY THE
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US AND OTHER COUNTRIES. THE LONG-TERM PROSPECT OF A
REFUGEE POPULATION WHICH CONTINUES TO GROW MAKES IT IM-
POSSIBLE FOR THE RTG TO CONSIDER LARGE-SCALE LOCAL SET-
TLEMENT AT THIS TIME. IN FACT, FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT TO
BECOME A REALITY, FUANGCHALOEI REITERATED THAT THE US
AND OTHER COUNTRIES MUST, AT LEAST ON A ONE-TIME BASIS,
DRAW DOWN THE REFUGEE POPULATION IN THAILAND TO A MORE

ACCEPTABLE LEVEL.

3. DESPITE THE CONTINUED INCREASE OF THE REFUGEE POPULATION, FUANGCHALOEI EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR THE US OFFER OF ONE TO TWO MILLION DOLLARS TO BE USED AS SEED MONEY TO CATALYZE LOCAL SETTLEMENT. FUANGCHALOEI SAID THAT THE RTG MIGHT BE WILLING TO CONSIDER USING THIS MONEY TO RELOCATE AND PROMOTE SELF-SUFFICIENCY FOR A SMALL NUMBER OF REFUGEES, PERHAPS 500. FUANGCHALOEI SAID THAT FOR POLITICAL REASONS, THE RTG COULD NOT PERMIT SUCH PILOT PROJECTS TO BE CALLED LOCAL SETTLEMENT OR RESETTLEMENT. FUANGCHALOEI SUGGESTED INSTEAD THAT "RELOCATION" OR "SELF-SUFFICIENCY" WOULD BE SUITABLE TERMS.

4. LOWMAN SAID THAT IT WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO SHIFT REFUGEES FROM ONE CAMP ENVIRONMENT TO ANOTHER. LOWMAN POINTED OUT THAT THE REFUGEES SHOULD HAVE FREE ACCESS TO THE ECONOMY AND BE ALLOWED SOME FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AT LEAST IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY. FUANGCHALOEI INDICATED VAGUELY THAT SUCH CONDITIONS MIGHT BE POSSIBLE, AND THAT IF THE PROJECT SEEMED TO BE WORKING AND THERE WERE NO SECURITY PROBLEMS, SUCH REFUGEES COULD ASPIRE TO THAI CITIZENSHIP AFTER PERHAPS FIVE YEARS (THE MINIMUM WAITING TIME FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR CITIZENSHIP UNDER THAI LAW). FUANGCHALOEI CERTAINLY AGREED THAT

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THE UNHCR RATIONS FOR CARE AND MAINTENANCE WOULD NOT CONTINUE, ONCE THE REFUGEES HAD MOVED TO THE NEW PROJECT AREA.

5. FUANGCHALOEI STATED THE STRONG RTG PREFERENCE FOR BILATERAL FUNDING AND PLANNING FOR THE PROJECT. LOWMAN SAID THAT THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE AT LEAST A CONSULTATIVE ROLE FOR THE UNHCR. ANY MORE SIGNIFICANT MOVES TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE UNDER UNHCR ORCHESTRATION. FUANGCHALOEI THEN PROCEEDED TO CRITICIZE THE UNHCR AT SOME LENGTH, AND RETURNED AGAIN TO THE PREFERENCE THE RTG HAS FOR A BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US GOVERNMENT. LOWMAN INDICATED THAT THE FINAL FORM FOR FUNDING, PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTING SUCH A PROJECT CAN BE DEFERRED FOR LATER DISCUSSIONS, BUT THAT SOME UNHCR ROLE WOULD BE ESSENTIAL.

6. COMMENT: FUANGCHALOEI STATED THAT HE WAS SPEAKING PERSONALLY IN THESE DISCUSSIONS. IN LIGHT OF HIS POSITION AS A KEY RTG FIGURE ON REFUGEE POLICY, HIS VIEWS MAY INDICATE A SHIFT WITHIN THE RTG TOWARD GREATER RECEPTIVITY TO THE IDEA OF A PILOT PROJECT

FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND. THE
PROVISO WOULD BE TO AVOID A PUBLIC IMPRESSION THAT
THE RTG HAS ACCEDED TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT ON A BROADER
SCALE.
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